



It All Started With A Phone Call With Tom Hanks



👁 166 ✓ 49 ★ 40

Chapter 1 by Adam Muller

One night I got a phone call from Tom Hanks at 9:33pm. I thought it was a prank. It wasn't. He was to deliver a message he said, which he did, and then my brain left my body and I could feel my heartbeat in my legs.

When my brain came back Tom Hanks was laughing and then I started laughing too. I tried to ask questions but I couldn't complete one. I sounded like a car trying to start. I know this because Tom Hanks told me so.

Our phone call ended at 9:47pm.

Chapter 2 by Joakim



I felt very lightheaded after the conversation with Hanks. Then I started to piece together what he actually told me.

"You have been nominated for an Oscar for your part in the movie 'Shadow Grows'."

I wanted to laugh it off as a prank but after the accident I have a five years span of my life where I don't remember anything at all.

Instead I looked up the movie on Netflix and pressed start...

Chapter 3 by Mike Doane



As all dreams must, this one came to an end.

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"Shadow Grows" was supposed to be something. The script was good, the director was up and coming, the budget was solid. What the hell went wrong?

The papers called it a tarnish on Sam Smith's reputation before it could take off. The indie writer and director was compared to the Cohen Brothers before his career came crashing down around him in one fell swoop. Some defended him. They blamed the actors. They blamed me. Said I should have never been given the part, that I am an amateur fit for commercials and Lifetime specials. They said I wasn't cut out for real work as an actor.

Maybe they were right.

I fumbled through the darkness, searched my drawers, and dressed. It had been two weeks since I'd gotten a paycheck. The movie had never made it to a theatrical release. The critics cut it short and it found its way to the "Straight to DVD" pile. What a joke.

Light peaked through the bathroom windows. This was my throne now. It's all my life's achievements. A house -- no, a shack -- I bought ten years ago in the countryside outside Hollywood. And now the only thing that works is the damn toilet.

Still, it's not so fun when your power's out and you're not on public water. I finished going to the bathroom, picked up a 5 gallon bucket from the floor, poured it into the toilet bowl, and flushed it dry.

"Is this what dreams are made of?" I asked aloud. "Is this what it's all been for?"

Chapter 4 by intellikat



Suddenly, my cell phone buzzed, nearly falling from the cracked sink to the tiled bathroom floor below. I snatched it as it drifted toward the precipice.

"Hello?"

A high-strained voice rose over the line. "Mike Muller?"

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"Yes, of course. Who else would I be?"

"Mister Muller. My name is Tom Hanks. I'm with the Agency. Are you familiar with us?"

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"Um. Yeah, yeah. Blackpaw? Sure, Blackpaw. You represent... um... that guy from CSI:Toledo."

"That's right. Among many other rising talents. Are you seated?"

"Uhm, yeah. Sure." I dropped the toilet seat cover and hunkered down.

"Your headshot came across my desk yesterday afternoon. I typically manage redheads and actors with aggressive facial hair. I noticed you had both and knew I would have to make contact. Would you be able to come into the agency this morning? I'd like to meet you and speak face to face? You do still have the goatee, yes?"

I blew through my lips. "Yeah, yeah. I do. Miss... sorry, I didn't catch your name."

"McNally. Patrick McNally."

"Sorry, Mr. McNally. I actually have representation already--"

"This is the moment dreams are made of, Mr. Muller." The voice of Patrick McNally quavered.

"This is what it's all been for. Please just give me 20 minutes of your morning."

I hesitated, and shifted my butt-cheeks from left to right.

Chapter 5 by intellikat



I sat in the waiting room of the Blackpaw Agency, shifting my butt-cheeks from left to right once again.

A girlfriend in graduate school had told me this was a nervous tic of mine, and that I should use it to my advantage. To be honest, I had tried to do so in "Shadow Grows," during particular moments of high tension. Like Marlon Brando looking heavenward in the Godfather, Mike Muller's trademark was his shuffling butt-cheeks. But I digress.

"Mr. Muller?" The assistant at the desk motioned to a door. "Mr. McNally is ready to see you

now.

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I stood and made my way to the door. I knew that first impressions were important. Even in graduate acting school, our professors emphasized the importance of making a good first impression. I remembered the proper way to enter a room, remembering which way the handle turned, where to focus eye contact, proper

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breathing technique, the right length of one's stride as matched to the size of the room, etc. This type of micromanagement within the industry drove me insane, but in my first 2 or 3 years in LA I realized it all to be necessary.

And so I turned the handle... aware of it opening inward and to the left, took in a deep breath, spied the far wall and adjusted my step, but before I could make eye contact with Patrick McNally or anyone else for that matter, a shocking blow struck me in the solar-plexus, and I collapsed to the floor, heaving.

"Haha, there he is, the joker!" came a voice chortling out from behind the door I had entered by. A meaty palm landed on my head and tussled my hair. "Mike Muller! Get off your paws, you old dog, you, hahaha!"

The voice was familiar, and as I turned my head I saw the grinning visage of a classmate from graduate school, Manny Galindo. The short, hispanic actor was beaming. This was the same classmate who had left a fish in my apartment's ventilation system, and a turd in my refrigerator's butter dish. I actually hadn't seen him since a Christmas party the year before, though we kept some minor contact.

"Here's a hand, Mike," said a voice sounding like that of Patrick McNally, and I was lifted from the floor to face the agent and Manny, who had now joined his side. "Please, have a seat." Manny slapped me hard on the back and laughed as I sat.

"Look. Let me get straight to the point, I'm obviously representing Mr. Galindo here. And I'm putting him out for a new TV series this week-- but the catch is that what they are really looking for is a DUO to cast. If we can show them a chemistry between the two of you, I think we can land this one."

"Umm. What's the show?"

"It's a new drama series on TNT about a family who does foreign exchange online to raise

money for a small Christian cult run on their Oklahoma property, it's called *Exotic Country*. By the way, Tom Hanks is producing it."

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Whataya think, buddy?

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Chapter 19: Mike P.



My mind reeled, this was just like old times. I, Mike Muller, had been a part of a small Christian, (Protestant specifically) cult, but it was based in Texas not Oklahoma, and we dealt with U.S. based stocks not foreign exchange. I had gotten out to pursue my career in show business, my family would never approve, so I had to run away, with only the American dream to sustain me. "I... need to take a seat," I said through clenched teeth, still clutching my stomach. I lurched into the guest seat across from Patrick McNally's imposing solid oak desk.

"May I see the pilot episode script?" I asked, mind still racing.

"Of course, it's on the desk in front of you," McNally intoned.

"What's the matter buddy? You and me back in action, you don't need a script, you just gotta feel it!" Manny laughed punching me in the shoulder.

I barely felt it.

The writer of the pilot episode was, Mr. Ileum Elk.

That was my name before I changed it to escape my past, Mike Muller being an anagram of Mr. Ileum Elk.

Apparently, I had been busy during those five forgotten years of my life.

"Where did you get this from?" I asked McNally, shifting my butt cheeks furiously from left to right.

"Oh someone years back sent Tom Hanks a whole season of scripts, and he just know feels that the cast is correct, for the masterpiece to be put to film."

I flipped open the pilot script, more questions than ever, butt cheeks tense as always.

Chapter 7 by Luke Meyers



The pilot was a runaway success, and the network ordered a full season. Contracts were signed, more sets were built, and we acted. Everything happened faster than I could have imagined. I didn't know what to make of it. This was the culmination of the dream I'd left my home to pursue, but I was still a little lost.

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People kept asking me what it was like to work with Tom Hanks. Was he really the nicest guy in show business? I couldn't answer them; he was the shot-caller, but we didn't see much of him on set. When we did, he was surrounded by a cloud of assistants and production higher-ups. I caught his eye a couple of times, but that's it. Still, there seemed to be something odd in the look he gave me. Familiar? Was he smirking?

I tried not to worry about it, and lost myself in the work. We cranked out several good episodes. Manny was a back-slapping ass, but we had good chemistry on camera. I developed a grudging respect for him. Our ratings continued to climb; it was starting to look like we'd all make our careers on this one.

Fan mail began to pour in. This was a new one for me, and I relished it. Every time there was a pile of envelopes, I'd abscond with my parcel and tear into it in the confines of my dressing room. I knew it was foolish, but I loved the adoration. Some of it was a little crazy, but that was to be expected.

One envelope felt a bit different. Stiff. I opened it and gaped in shock, dropping the envelope and its contents on my dressing room table. Inside was a small flyer, printed on cardstock, advertising an upcoming prayer revival in West Jenks, Texas. My hometown, and home to only one church -- the cult I'd barely escaped.

I reeled at the implications, looking around me in sudden irrational fear of being watched. Abruptly, the phone rang. I stared at it, but it kept ringing, so I answered.

"Hello?"

"Hello, Mr. Elk. This is Tom Hanks."

I looked at the clock. It was 9:33 p.m.

Chapter 8 by Luke Meyers



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"Seriously? You think there's an ending that makes sense for all this? It's practically all scene-setting and exposition! You want to fit the entire plot arc into the last chapter."

"You're right, Tom, you're right. I just hate to see this happen to a project that has your name attached to it."

"Don't sweat it, kid. You wouldn't believe half the shit that doesn't see the light of day. Some real turkeys."

We jawed on for a while pleasantly about this and other foibles of show business, then said our goodbyes.

When I hung up, the clock read 9:48 p.m.

the end

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